



Gateway to
the history
of Shropshire
and Telford

A short guide to wills

- ◇ Wills are of great value to the family historian. They frequently contain bequests to family members and so they often provide information which would be difficult to obtain from any other source.
- ◇ Locating a surviving will is not always easy - it depends on the date.
- ◇ For a will to have legal status, after the person has died, it has to be **proved**. A **grant of probate** is then given to the executor, who has to carry out the details of the will.

◆ Before 1858

- ◇ Before 1858 wills were proved at church courts. For most parishes in Shropshire, this was the relevant **diocesan court** - i.e. Lichfield, Hereford or St. Asaph. Some indexes are available at Shropshire Archives, but the wills themselves are kept at diocesan record offices.
- ◇ If the person who died held property in more than one diocese, then the will was proved in the court of the Archbishop of York (for the north) or Canterbury (for the south). Wills concerning large and prestigious estates were often proved in these courts as well.
- ◇ Shropshire wills concerning large estates or property in more than one diocese were proved in the court of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This court was known as the **Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC)**.
- ◇ There were some parishes entitled to prove their own wills. These are known as **peculiar**s. Please ask staff for further details or check our book *Family History: Guide to Sources*.
- ◇ There is an index to wills proved in the peculiar courts in Auden's *The local peculiar courts of Shropshire*. C 55.5. Most are held at Lichfield Record Office, although we have a will register for the Peculiar of Shrewsbury St Mary's – see the parish list (P257 for more detail).
- ◇ Draft wills can occasionally be found in family, estate or solicitors collections.

Contact details for wills made before 1858:

- Lichfield Diocese: Lichfield Record Office, The Friary, Lichfield, WS13 6QG www.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives An index for some (1650-1750) is at <http://www.staffsnameindexes.org.uk/> and wills from 1521-1860 can be viewed on www.FindMyPast.co.uk
- Hereford Diocese: Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre, Fir Tree Lane, Rotherwas, Hereford HR2 6LA <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/archives>
- St Asaph Diocese: National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, Cymru/Wales SY23 3BU www.llgc.org.uk
You can search, view and order wills via their website.
- PCC: The National Archives, Ruskin Ave, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU www.nationalarchives.gov.uk You can search and order wills via their website.

◆ After 1858

- ◇ All wills for England and Wales proved after 1858 are held centrally.
- ◇ Shropshire Archives holds copies of wills registered with the **Shrewsbury and Montgomeryshire Probate Registry** between 1858 and 1940.
- ◇ There is a name index to these wills (2 blue bound volumes on the shelves in the reading room and search room).
- ◇ To see the wills at Shropshire Archives, you need one of our **Readers' Tickets**.
- ◇ The wills held at Shropshire Archives cannot be photocopied because they are in bound volumes, but copies of any post 1858 wills can be ordered through the probate service.
- ◇ You can search for and order post 1858 wills for England and Wales from the probate service: <https://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate>
This site also has a PDF to download with the current postal address if you prefer to order by post.

Shropshire Archives

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